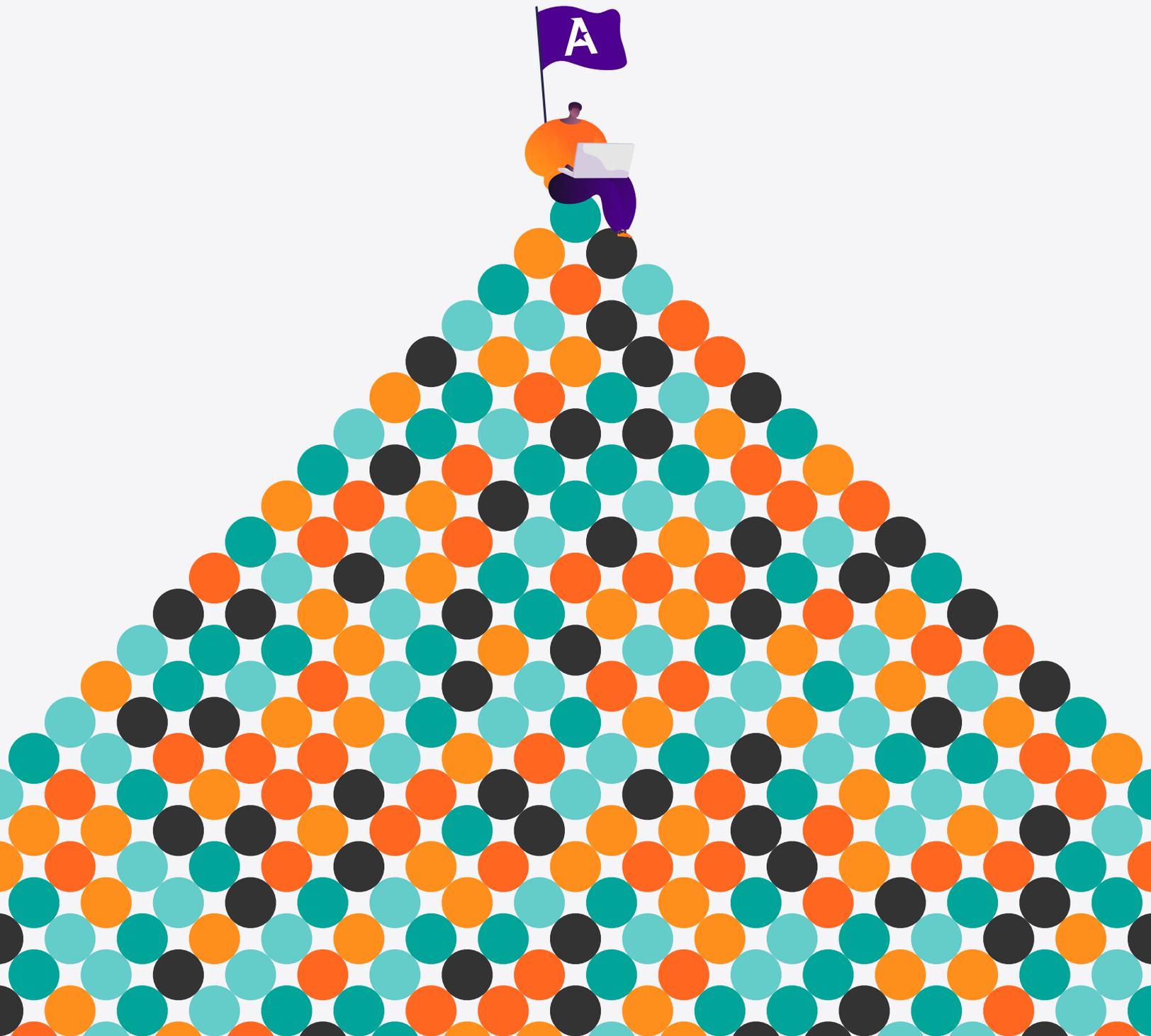# Achievers

THE GREAT RECOGNITION
Empowering change in the new world of work

Achievers Workforce Institute 2022 State of Recognition Report

Contents

Business leaders in this new era of work are facing novel and sustained challenges, from driving retention to adapting to hybrid ways of working and everything in between. Without bold vision and data-driven decision making, companies will find themselves struggling to attract, retain, and empower top talent in this new business landscape.

HR leaders must recognize the realities that surround them and adapt to meet the expectations of a workforce that knows what it wants and isn't willing to compromise.

Employees are increasingly re-evaluating their roles. They are demanding sustainable work-life integration, continual career progression, and a deep sense of belonging and fulfillment. That's a tall order, but it's a candidate's market and HR leaders must understand that to be competitive, looking beyond salary is necessary to compete.

To attract and retain, it's no longer enough to simply meet table stakes. Benefits, vacation time, flexible hours — these are all expected in today's market. Employers must think and play much bigger to meaningfully engage people at work. The key to unlocking unique and compelling value for candidates is with employees themselves, who can provide a never-ending stream of inspiration.

Once steeped in the realities of this new world of work, and the fresh strategies and approaches to navigate it, leveraging employee data to identify the actions that drive retention will provide the intelligence to help attract and retain the very best talent available.

The employee data set behind this body of research points emphatically to a key lever for how employees want to be engaged and retained: recognition.

Building a culture of meaningful, appreciative recognition is business critical in order to increase engagement and contribute to a deep sense of belonging for all employees, predicting an abundance of positive outcomes.

Meaningful recognition is a key driver of every aspect of belonging. With the right timing, it ensures people feel welcomed and the right message makes them feel known, included, and supported. Recognition is also an incredible tool for nurturing connection at work, strengthening relationships across teams, offices, and geographies.

However, not all recognition is created equal. To achieve the desired impact, these messages of appreciation must be meaningful to each and every person they reach. A simple "thanks" is not the same as a specific, personal acknowledgement that speaks to the impact that person made on others and its contribution to company culture.

When asked about meaningfulness versus frequency, two-thirds of employees said they would choose a more meaningful recognition over receiving recognition more often — pointing to the reality that recognition for recognition's sake is not the goal. Purposeful recognition given at the right time reaps much more reward for employees and employers alike. Undoubtedly, the more frequently that recognition is done right, the more likely people are to stay.

In fact, while belonging and engagement clearly impact job commitment, recognition frequency also has a direct impact on intention to job hunt. Those recognized weekly are almost fifty percent less likely to job hunt as those never recognized — and five times more likely to report strong commitment to their jobs.

Recognition is a powerhouse engagement tool on many levels, and a strong culture of recognition can help retain talent by competing beyond salary and standard benefits and perks. Half (52%) of employees say feeling recognized for their efforts would reduce the negative impact of a salary freeze and two-thirds say feeling recognized would reduce their desire to job hunt.

The right recognition platform makes it possible for leaders to efficiently and effectively meet their employees' desire for a deeper sense of purpose, connection, belonging, and validation at work. A strong culture of recognition increases job commitment and productivity while reinforcing core company values. An abundance of data shows that an optimized recognition platform is a must-have for forward-thinking organizations to retain talented people, empowered to perform the best work of their lives.

As business leaders adjust and adapt to the new world of work, attracting and engaging employees, and inspiring them to stay, requires bold decisions and investment. Recognition is a foundational element of a positive employee experience that results in increased job commitment, productivity, and advocacy — all of which contribute to a positive impact on the business' bottom line.

Welcome to the Great Recognition. It may seem new and uncertain, but with data to guide the way, every leader has the opportunity to make informed decisions that support employee and organizational success.

Dr. Natalie Baumgartner
Chief Workforce Scientist

Key findings

1. Employee demands are changing with work-life balance, career progression, and recognition topping the list of requirements

2. HR is still struggling to attract and retain in this new world of work

3. Recognition drives job commitment, with those recognized weekly the least likely to job hunt

4. Recognition can outweigh salary for driving advocacy, job commitment, and productivity

5. Managers are the linchpin of a culture of recognition, but companies are falling behind on training

6. The right recognition program is crucial for driving recognition at every level
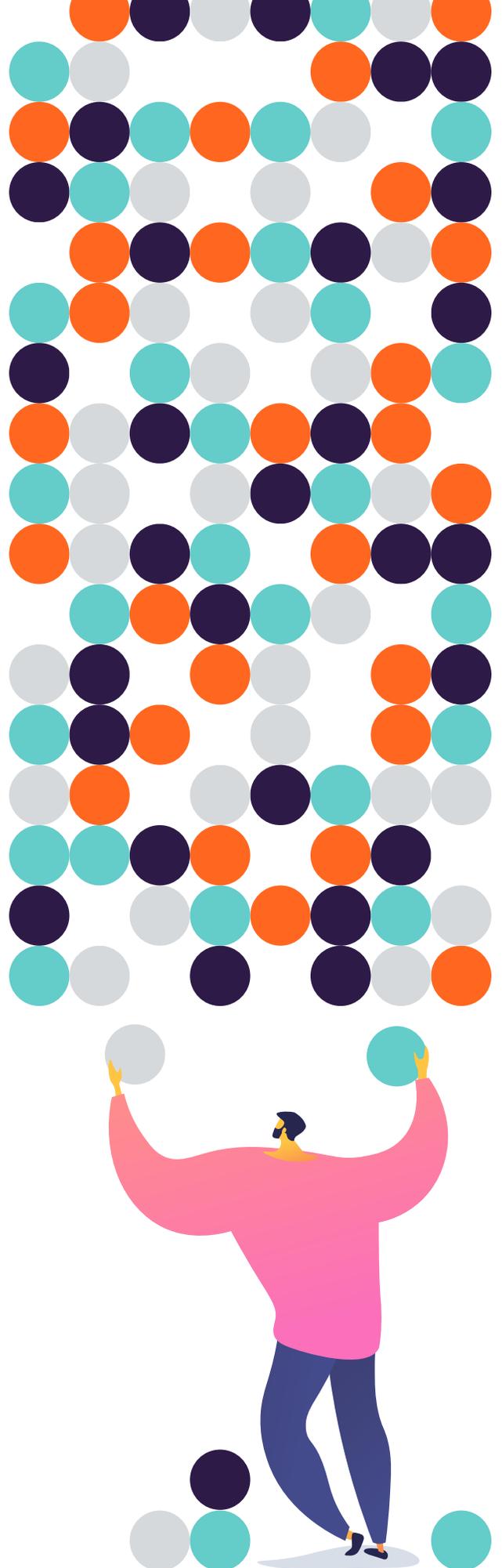
Entitled or empowered?

In a candidate's market, employers need to go above and beyond to create a brand that attracts and an environment that retains. In this new era of work, employees increasingly feel empowered (or entitled) to a culture, benefits, and perks that are the right fit for their desired lifestyle.

Work-life balance is one of those job attributes leading them to either job hunt or to stay in a role, and employees are no longer willing to compromise.

According to data from AWI's wellbeing research from the end of 2021, two-thirds of employees want to work remotely or have hybrid work options in 2022.

39% *of employees would be willing to job hunt to get their preferred working conditions.*

The top three reasons to job hunt are:

1. Career progression
2. Better work-life balance
3. Better compensation and corporate benefits

The top three reasons people will stay in their jobs are:

1. Work-life balance
2. Career progression
3. Recognition

Clearly, employers must compete beyond even a competitive salary with standard benefits and perks to attract and retain top talent. So, what can HR and business leaders do to keep their teams happy?

Recognize to retain: the business case for recognition

Research consistently shows that one business tool in particular has a myriad of effects, from boosting engagement and retention, to driving productivity. This tool builds connections, makes people feel welcomed and included, contributes to manager effectiveness, and more.

The tool? Meaningful recognition.

The latest research from AWI shows that individuals recognized weekly are twice as likely as average to have strong job commitment — and five times more likely than those never recognized to say they rarely think about job hunting.

I rarely think about looking for a job elsewhere
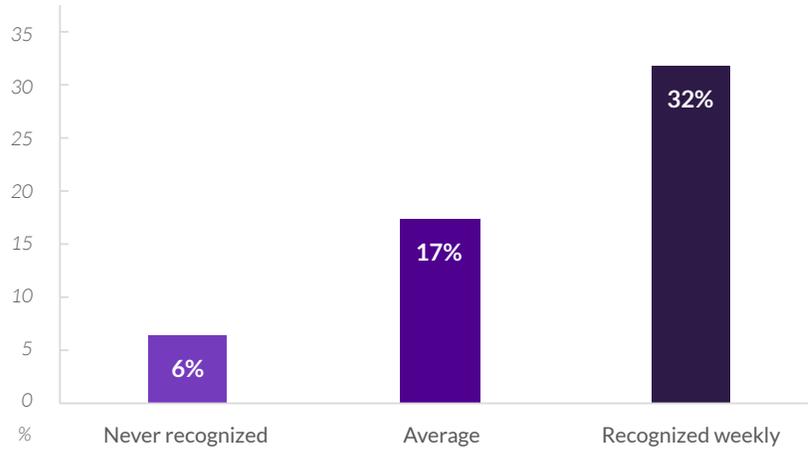
People recognized weekly are almost half as likely as those never recognized to say they won't job hunt in 2022.

I will job hunt in 2022

65%
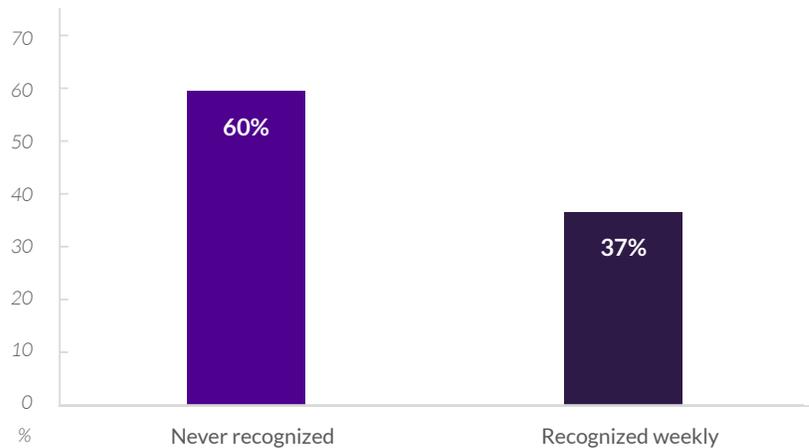
Two-thirds (65%) of respondents say feeling recognized would reduce their desire to job hunt.

57%

More than half (57%) of respondents say feeling recognized would reduce the likelihood that they would take a call from a headhunter.

The power of recognition extends beyond retention, impacting almost every business outcome that HR leaders seek to improve.

Recognition drives productivity, engagement, belonging and more

Recognition is a powerful lever to help drive multiple positive outcomes, from almost doubling productivity, engagement, and belonging, to encouraging employees to advocate for their company. Employee advocacy is a crucial tool for creating a culture and brand that attracts new candidates. Employees who are advocates for their company are more likely to leave positive reviews online and to refer great candidates into the organization.

	Recognized weekly	Average	Never recognized
I am my most productive self at work	33%	19%	9%
I am highly engaged	46%	26%	11%
I feel a strong sense of belonging at work	39%	21%	5%
I would recommend my company to others	42%	22%	3%
I am enthusiastic about my job	37%	20%	5%

What's more, recognition outweighs the perception of a fair salary as a driver of employee advocacy, job commitment, and productivity. With the knowledge that recognition is critical to organizational success, how can HR and business leaders create a culture of recognition to drive results?
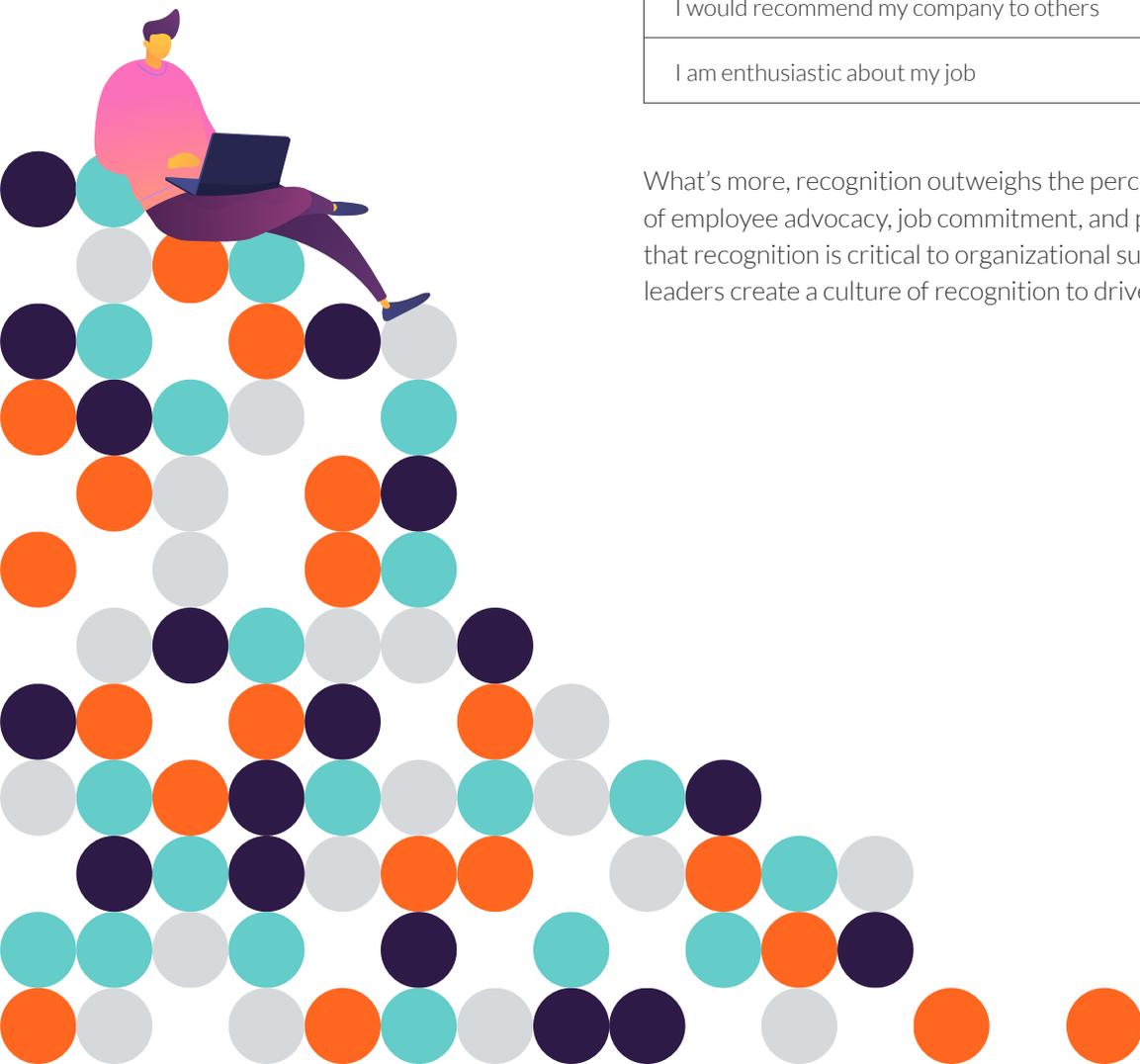
"Thanks" isn't enough

Whenever recognition is discussed, there are naysayers who argue that people don't need a thank you for doing their job or who think that a dedicated program will encourage frequent recognitions with low value. The truth is that everyone benefits from being appreciated. But superficial, vague recognitions never drive results the way that meaningful, appreciative recognitions do.

Asked whether they would prefer more frequent or more meaningful recognition, the overwhelming majority (64%) said they wanted their recognitions to be more meaningful.

What makes a recognition meaningful? According to respondents, the top three factors of a meaningful recognition are:

1. About something specific that I did
2. About me as an individual or about something I value
3. About the way in which I made a difference to the person who sent me the recognition

Employers need to encourage not only frequent recognition, but frequent meaningful recognition. And to do that they need to start at the top.
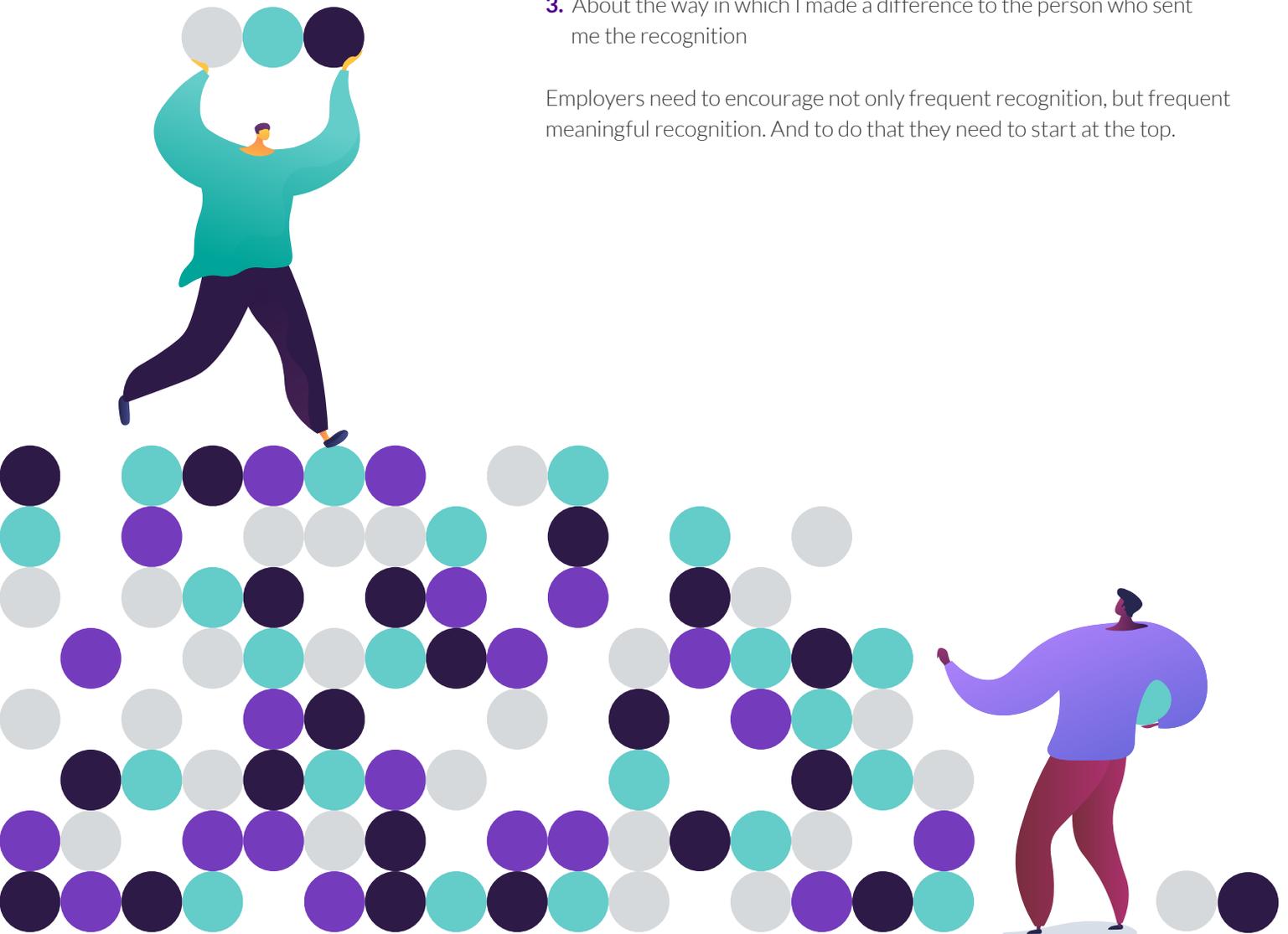
Manager recognition: the cornerstone of culture

From senior leaders to frontline people managers, when individual contributors observe recognition behavior above them, they are more likely to emulate that for their peers.

People who say they are regularly recognized by their manager in a way that makes them feel valued are more likely to recognize others, contributing to an overall culture of recognition.

Recognition is also a powerful tool for managers to engage their employees as advocates. Those regularly recognized by managers are three times more likely to say they would recommend their manager to others. At AWI we call this an mNPS — Manager Net Promotor Score. Recognition is one of four factors of manager effectiveness that can strongly influence this marker of success.
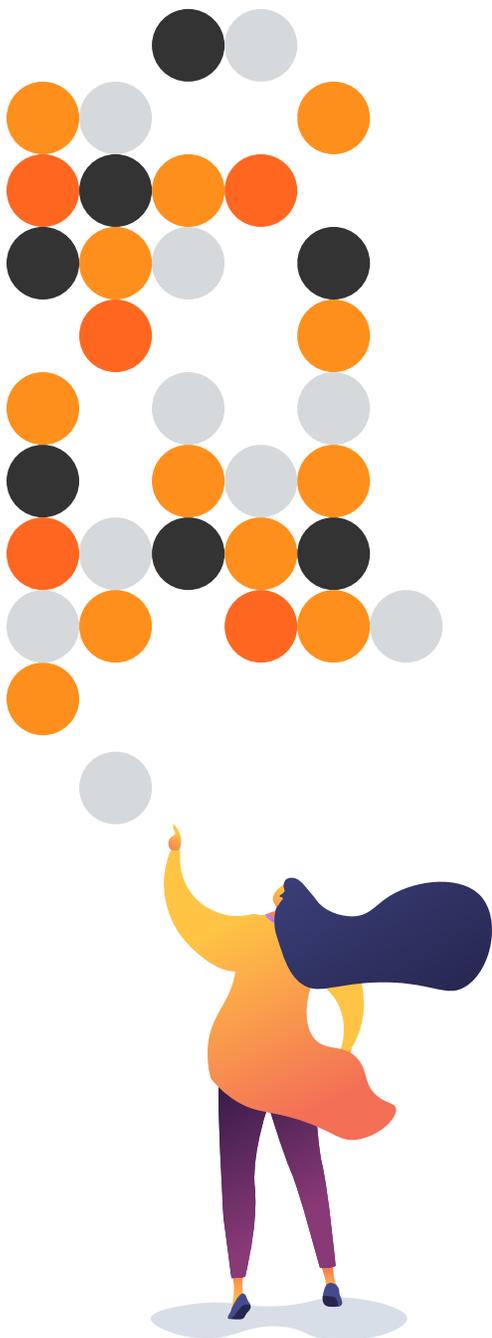
	Regularly recognized by managers	Average
I would recommend my manager to others	75%	24%
I would recommend this company as a great place to work	58%	22%
I rarely think about looking for a job elsewhere	43%	17%
I am enthusiastic about my job	52%	20%
I am my most productive self at work	46%	19%

The power of consistent, meaningful manager recognition is clear. However, many employers are not taking steps to train and empower their leaders to be high-impact recognizers.

Training to reinforce best practices

Encouraging specific behaviors requires both introducing them as early as possible as well as reinforcing them regularly. Training has clear benefits for introducing and reinforcing key behaviors. However, training is often seen as "one and done" — with an idea being introduced but hardly reinforced. Regular training is key to driving results, and it's no different for recognition.

Regular training on recognition best practices is crucial for developing and nurturing a culture of recognition, and the data shows a disconnect between leaders and employees on the perception of training being provided. While nine out of 10 HR leaders say they provide recognition training to their staff at least once, this training is clearly not resonating with employees, with less than half saying they have received any training at all.
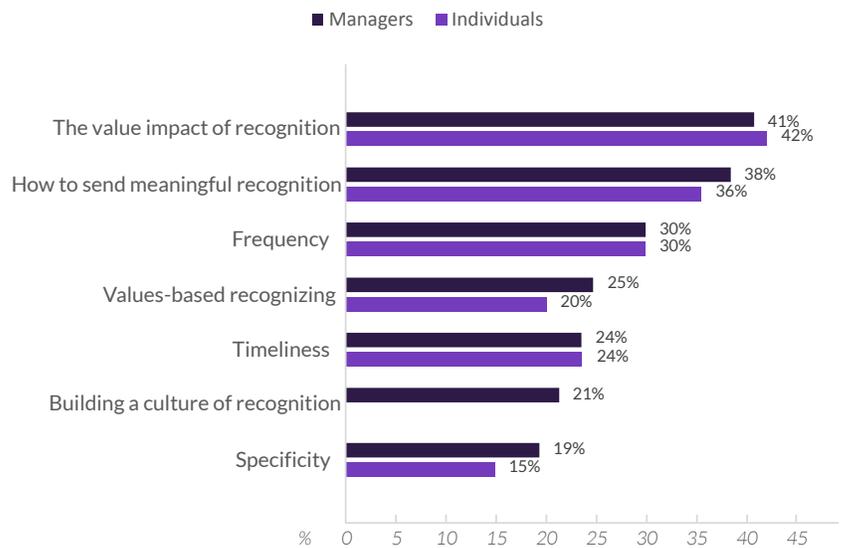
HR-Employee disconnect: recognition training

	Value
We offer recognition training to individuals	90%
I received recognition training (individuals)	41%
We offer training to managers	91%
I received recognition training (managers)	53%

In organizations that do offer recognition training, most train on the value and impact of recognition, with just one-third offering training on how to send a meaningful recognition. Given how crucial meaningfulness is to recognition impact, this is a clear area for improvement for business leaders.

Training offered in recognition best practices

■ Managers ■ Individuals

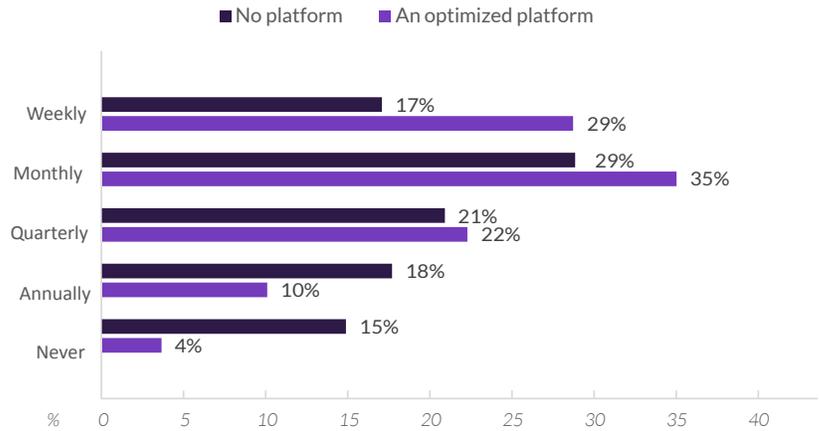|	Managers	Individuals
The value impact of recognition	41%	42%
How to send meaningful recognition	38%	36%
Frequency	30%	30%
Values-based recognizing	25%	20%
Timeliness	24%	24%
Building a culture of recognition	21%	
Specificity	19%	15%

If we revisit what makes a recognition meaningful, the criteria were specifically about the behavior, the personalized details, and the impact of the behavior being recognized. Organizations must train on these particular elements to build a culture of meaningful, appreciative recognition.

Once this training is in place, there are important tools that can help create and maintain this culture of recognition.

Investing in the right tools

How often are you meaningfully recognized?

■ No platform ■ An optimized platform

	No platform	An optimized platform
Weekly	17%	29%
Monthly	29%	35%
Quarterly	21%	22%
Annually	18%	10%
Never	15%	4%

% 0 5 10 15 20 25 30 35 40

Scalability is a constant push across most business functions. HR leaders must not only find solutions that work, but solutions that scale, ensuring that as an organization grows and expands it is able to maintain and improve results. This is particularly true for recognition. It's easy for a single team to have a strong culture of recognition, but how can HR expand that to every team, to every individual and every manager?

A key and powerful step is investing in an optimized recognition platform. AWI research shows that an optimized platform drives results, whereas a manual or ad hoc platform is unlikely to effectively support business objectives.

However, not all platforms are created equal. An effective platform harnesses the power of behavioral science and is underpinned with data-informed best practices.

Curious how you track on these best practices? Review our [Recognition Optimization Checklist today](#).

Here's what the research says makes a platform effective:

1. Focus on both quality and quantity
Having employees only recognized a few times a year simply won't move the needle on engagement and retention, and neither will superficial recognitions. The data reviewed in this report demonstrates that, without question, recognition must be both frequent and meaningful. Investing in a platform that is intuitive for employees to use, such as one that mimics popular social media sites, makes recognizing easy. Look for a solution that encourages at least monthly recognition to drive positive outcomes from recognition frequency, and that has mechanisms in place to support meaningful recognition — that is, recognitions that are specific, personal, and impact-oriented.

2. Ensure recognitions occur within the flow of work
An effective platform should integrate with the tools employees live and breathe every day, such as the HRIS, Teams, and Outlook. Our data shows that more than half (55%) of employees want to recognize in the flow of work, rather than having to log in to a specific platform every time. Be sure to also look for a consumer-grade mobile app solution that's easy and simple to use regardless of location and type of work. This will drive participation and visibility for online and offline populations.

3. Fuel with a proactive ongoing communication strategy
A recognition platform isn't "set it and forget it". An effective platform includes turnkey resources for frontline managers to support training goals. Look for a solution that supports ongoing communications and campaigns to encourage usage and activity. The AWI recommendation is to have four campaigns a year to increase visibility and awareness of the platform.

4. Measuring success with metrics that matter to the business
Tracking and monitoring program usage is a helpful indicator of a recognition program, but to demonstrate sustained impact to the business it's necessary to capture and measure outcome metrics beyond the program, such as engagement and retention. For example, linking to a voice-of-employee solution enables gathering feedback and reinforcing behaviors within the same program, so recognition can empower all engagement drivers.

Recommendations

1. *Recognize that the requirements for attracting and retaining top talent have changed*

Employees know what they want and are not willing to compromise. Meeting table stakes is no longer enough — HR leaders must be bold to attract and retain.

**2.** *Create a culture of meaningful recognition starting at the top*

Recognition drives job commitment and creating a culture of recognition is the only way to scale this impact. Manager and leader recognition is especially important for modelling best practice recognition behavior from the top.

3. *Train to introduce and reinforce*

Very few employees report receiving training on recognition best practices, and those that are trained typically only receive it once. Introduce regular training on how and why to send meaningful recognitions to empower every employee to contribute to a culture of recognition.

4. *Invest in a recognition platform that is rooted in best practices based on science*

There are many technology options out there but only a platform with the right features and support will drive the results HR leaders require. From the right metrics to key integrations, a recognition solution can be a true engagement and retention driver when carefully selected and executed well.
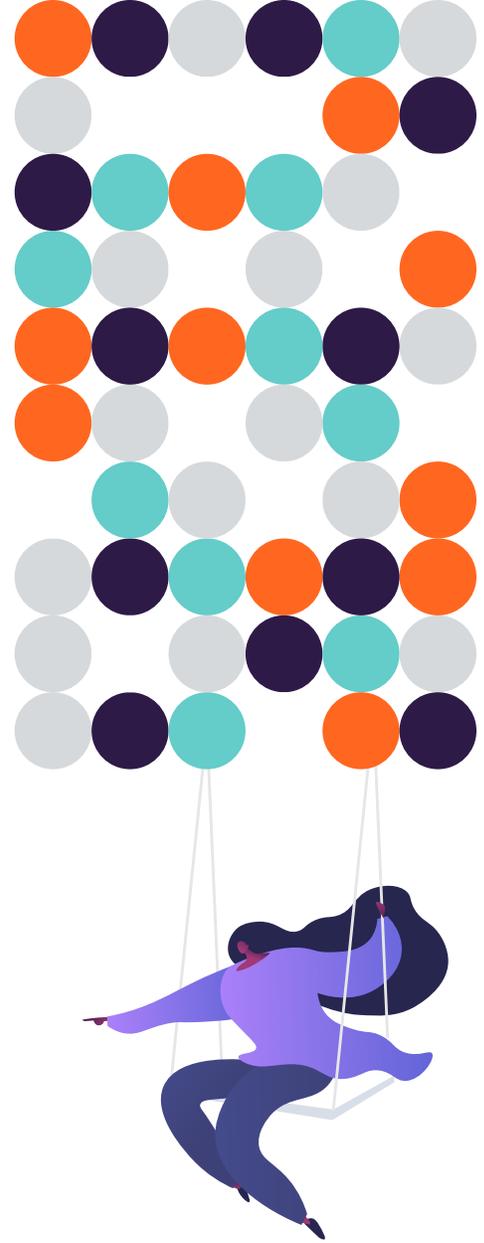
Getting recognition right

HR and business leaders know they are facing new complex challenges in attracting and retaining top talent. What they don't always know is what to do about it.

Recognizing the changes taking place in the business arena and knowing how to adapt are two different skills, but thankfully we have real-time data and research to help guide the decision-making process on both fronts.

As this body of research demonstrates, meaningful recognition is the most powerful lever available to move the needle on job commitment, engagement, belonging, and productivity. To be impactful, recognition must be both frequent and meaningful to support feeling welcomed, known, included, supported, and connected.

Without a thoughtful recognition platform, it is impossible to scale a recognition program. Individual efforts can only go so far in building a culture of recognition. Organizations must invest in programs that meet the standards of an effective program. That is a program that focusese on quantity and quality, while serving as a central hub for employees to visit regularly. It should integrate with the company's HRIS, and with their communication programs such as Zoom, Teams, and Slack — enabling people to recognize in the flow of daily work. Finally, an effective platform is one that is easy to use and where HR leaders are supported with appropriate training materials.

This is the Great Recognition: the recognition that we have entered a new world of work, one that acknowledges recognition as the single most powerful tool for meeting employee needs as they evolve.

With the right recognition platform and strategy, business leaders will ensure their organizations not only survive but thrive in this new era of work.
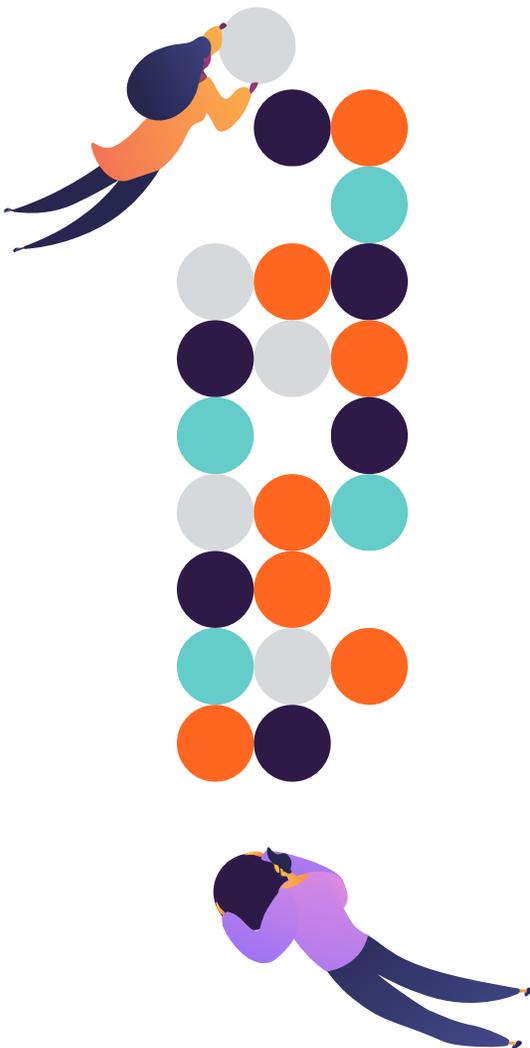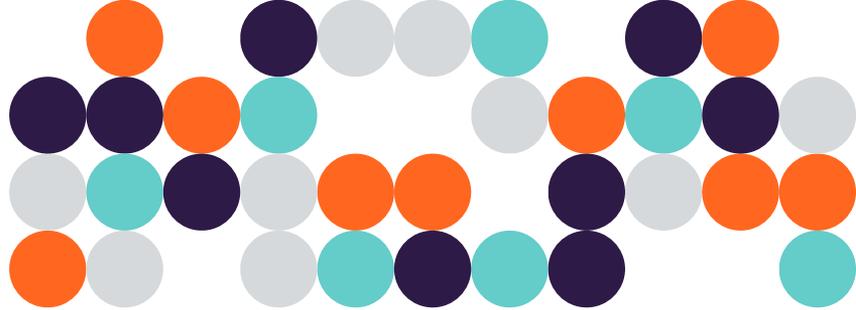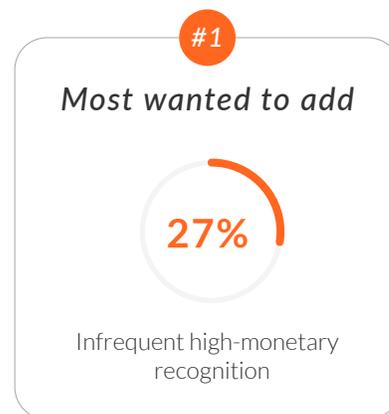
APPENDIX 1:

Under the hood

*What are your organizational peers doing for recognition?*

#1 Most common

36%

Social recognition (non-monetary)

#1 Most important

42%

Social recognition (non-monetary)

#1 Most wanted to add

27%

Infrequent high-monetary recognition

Recognition program features

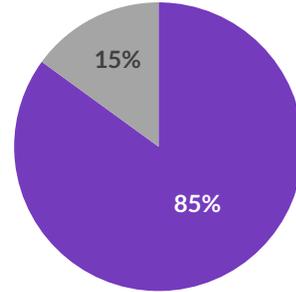|	We have this feature	This feature is important	I want to add this feature
Social recognition (non-monetary)	36%	42%	18%
Years of service awards	30%	26%	16%
Peer-to-peer recognition	29%	28%	14%
Frequent low-monetary recognition (<$20)	29%	31%	26%
Infrequent high-monetary recognition (>$100)	27%	27%	27%
Quarterly or annual awards	21%	18%	15%
Integrations that allow for recognition in the flow of work (e.g. Zoom, Slack, Outlook)	21%	27%	23%
Celebration cards (birthdays, anniversaries)	20%	16%	14%
Wellbeing support tools (mental, physical, financial, career)	19%	18%	14%
Performance-based incentives	18%	21%	12%
Ability to connect employees to build relationships	14%	15%	10%
Wide range of options for redeeming points	14%	12%	14%
Manager accountability tools	12%	11%	12%

Does your recognition platform integrate with your HRIS?
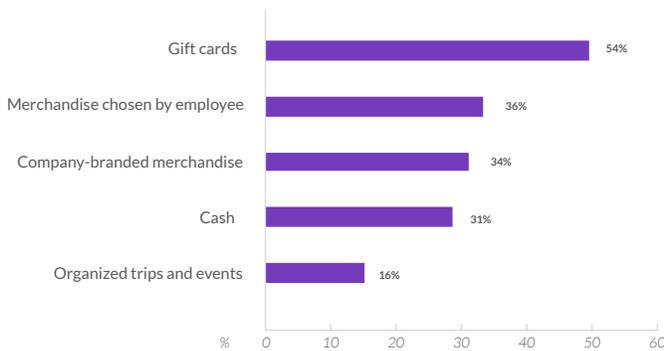
- Yes
- No
- Don't know

52%
27%
21%
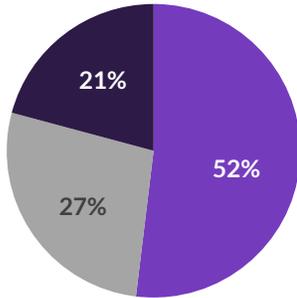
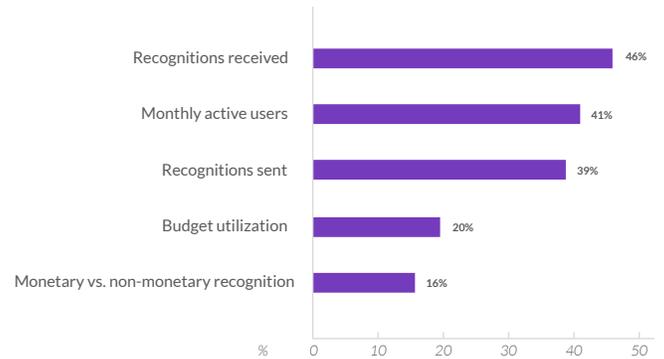## Do your recognition categories align with your company values?

- Yes
- No

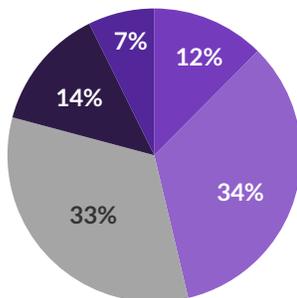85%
15%

What rewards are available through your program?

Reward	%
Gift cards	54%
Merchandise chosen by employee	36%
Company-branded merchandise	34%
Cash	31%
Organized trips and events	16%

How do you measure participation and activity?

Measure	%
Recognitions received	46%
Monthly active users	41%
Recognitions sent	39%
Budget utilization	20%
Monetary vs. non-monetary recognition	16%

What percentage of recognitions sent in your platform are non-monetary/social?

- 0-20%
- 21-40%
- 41-60%
- 61-80%
- 81-100%

12%
34%
33%
14%
7%

How do you promote your program?

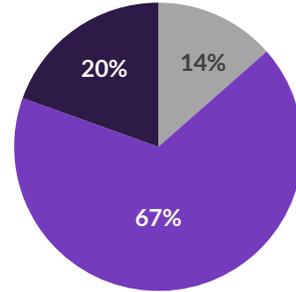| Method	%
Communication directly to managers	47%
Program campaigns or challenges	33%
Internal social media platform(s)	33%
Adding new features/functionality	24%
Showcase senior leadership participation	18%
Built into performance review	17%
Regularly sharing division performance for comparison	15%
Dedicated training sessions for managers	12%

How much do you allocate per employee, per year for recognition?

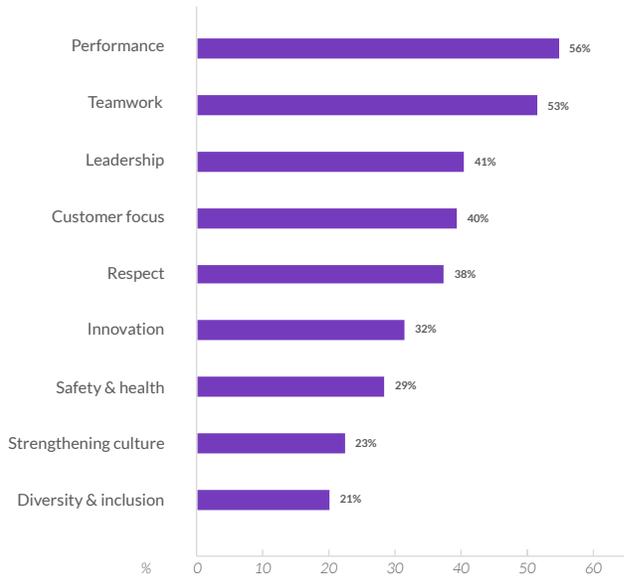■ $1-50 ■ $51-100 ■ $101-200 ■ $201-400 ■ $401+

11%
11%
26%
25%
26%
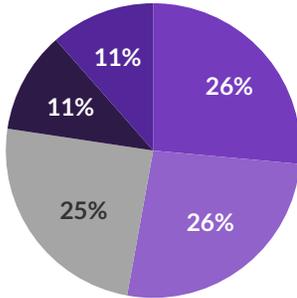
Do recognitions require approvals?

■ Never ■ Sometimes ■ Always

20%
14%
67%

What behaviors are recognized by your recognition program?

Behavior	%
Performance	56%
Teamwork	53%
Leadership	41%
Customer focus	40%
Respect	38%
Innovation	32%
Safety & health	29%
Strengthening culture	23%
Diversity & inclusion	21%

In the last year, how has your recognition budget changed?

■ Increased ■ Remained the same ■ Decreased

12%
32%
56%
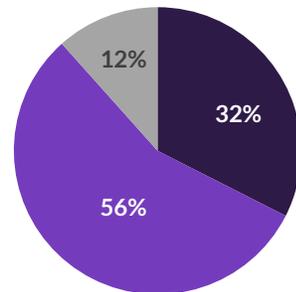
APPENDIX 2:
COUNTRY TRENDS

Australia

Employee insights

45%
will job hunt in 2022
Average: **43%**

22%
say their company has a strong culture of recognition
Average: **21%**

28%
are very highly engaged
Average: **26%**

How often are you meaningfully recognized?	Australia	Average
Weekly	26%	20%
Monthly	31%	31%
Quarterly	21%	23%
Annually	14%	16%
Never	9%	10%

Do you receive training on recognition best practices?	Australia	Average
Yes, only when I started in my role	16%	14%
Yes, only when the program launched	14%	13%
Yes, there are regular reminders (e.g. quarterly or annually)	16%	14%
No, I have never received training	55%	59%

HR insights
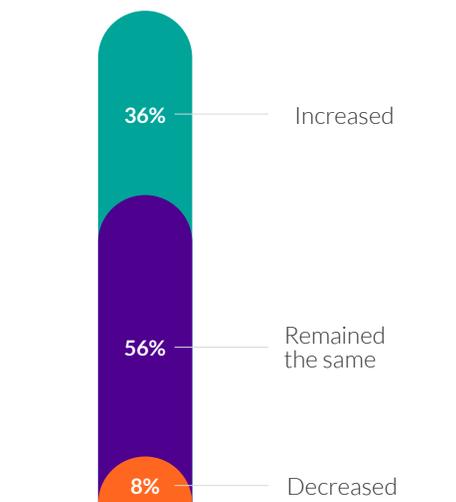
44%
have a recognition platform
Average: **48%**

25%
say their program is very effective at supporting their objectives
Average: **27%**

In the last year, how has your recognition and reward budget changed?

36% Increased
56% Remained the same
8% Decreased

**APPENDIX 2:
COUNTRY TRENDS**

Canada

Employee insights

42%

will job hunt in 2022

Average: **43%**

21%

say their company has a strong culture of recognition

Average: **21%**

23%

are very highly engaged

Average: **26%**

How often are you meaningfully recognized?	Canada	Average
Weekly	15%	20%
Monthly	32%	31%
Quarterly	24%	23%
Annually	18%	16%
Never	11%	10%

Do you receive training on recognition best practices?	Canada	Average
Yes, only when I started in my role	12%	14%
Yes, only when the program launched	14%	13%
Yes, there are regular reminders (e.g. quarterly or annually)	12%	14%
No, I have never received training	63%	59%

HR insights

50%

have a recognition platform

Average: **48%**

30%
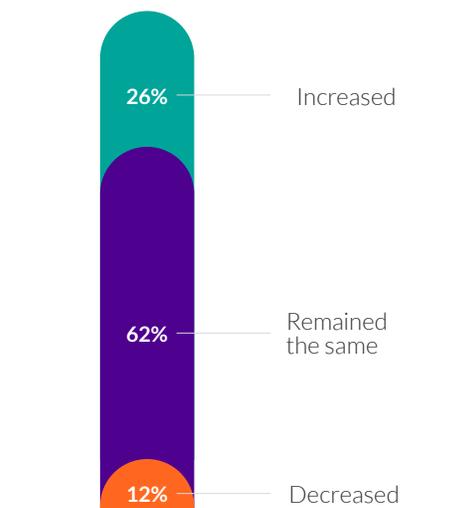
say their program is very effective at supporting their objectives

Average: **27%**

In the last year, how has your recognition and reward budget changed?

26% — Increased

62% — Remained the same

12% — Decreased

APPENDIX 2:
COUNTRY TRENDS

United Kingdom

Employee insights

45%
will job hunt in 2022
Average: **43%**

19%
say their company has a strong culture of recognition
Average: **21%**

23%
are very highly engaged
Average: **26%**

How often are you meaningfully recognized?	UK	Average
Weekly	17%	20%
Monthly	32%	31%
Quarterly	24%	23%
Annually	16%	16%
Never	11%	10%

Do you receive training on recognition best practices?	UK	Average
Yes, only when I started in my role	15%	14%
Yes, only when the program launched	16%	13%
Yes, there are regular reminders (e.g. quarterly or annually)	14%	14%
No, I have never received training	55%	59%

HR insights
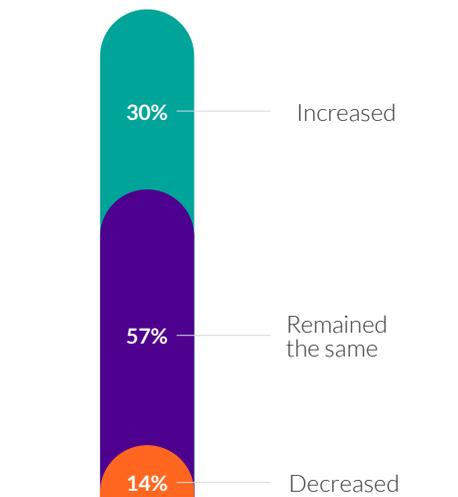
51%
have a recognition platform
Average: **48%**

22%
say their program is very effective at supporting their objectives
Average: **27%**

In the last year, how has your recognition and reward budget changed?

30% — Increased

57% — Remained the same

14% — Decreased

APPENDIX 2:
COUNTRY TRENDS

United States

Employee insights
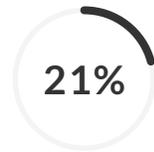
39%

will job hunt in
2022

Average: **43%**

21%

say their company
has a strong culture
of recognition

Average: **21%**

29%

are very highly
engaged

Average: **26%**

How often are you meaningfully recognized?	USA	Average
Weekly	20%	20%
Monthly	30%	31%
Quarterly	22%	23%
Annually	18%	16%
Never	10%	10%

Do you receive training on recognition best practices?	USA	Average
Yes, only when I started in my role	13%	14%
Yes, only when the program launched	11%	13%
Yes, there are regular reminders (e.g. quarterly or annually)	15%	14%
No, I have never received training	62%	59%

HR insights

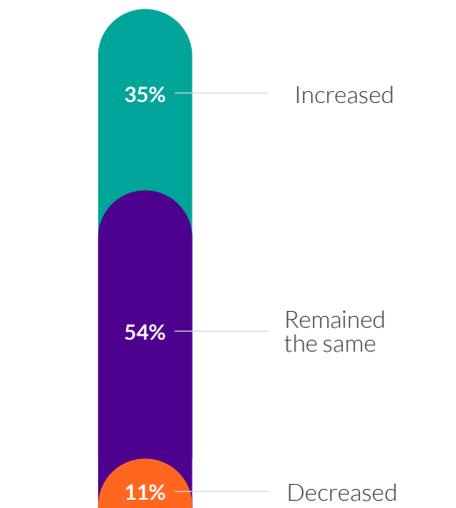**44%**

have a recognition platform

Average: **48%**

31%

say their program is very effective
at supporting their objectives

Average: **27%**

**In the last year, how has your recognition
and reward budget changed?**

35% — Increased

54% — Remained
the same

11% — Decreased

About the report

This research is based on two surveys conducted in February 2022. AWI surveyed 4275 employees across four countries and 1,646 HR leaders in five different countries.

Employees

1,055	**1,061**	**1,053**	**1,106**
Australia	Canada	United Kingdom	United States

HR leaders

109	**176**	**110**	**556**	**695**
Australia	Canada	Singapore	United Kingdom	United States

About Achievers

Great culture is the ultimate driver of organizational success. Achievers' recognition and employee voice solutions bring your organization's values and strategy to life by activating employee participation and accelerating a culture of performance.

Achievers leverages the science behind behavior change, so your people and your organization can experience sustainable, data-driven business results anywhere in the world. Integrated insights fuel smarter solutions that deliver just-in-time nudges to the entire organization and an industry-best customer success and support team guides you on every step of the journey. Contact us today.

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